Babar, Shaheen return as Pakistan name squad for Australia T20Is

By Our Sports Reporter

LAHORE: Former captains Babar Azam and Shaheen Shah Afridi have been recalled to Pakistan's Twenty20 squad for the three-match home series against Australia, while pacer Haris Rauf has been left out, the Pakistan Cricket Board announced on Friday.

Salman Ali Agha will continue as captain for the series, which will be Pakistan's final bilateral assignment before the ICC T20 World Cup, starting in India and Sri Lanka on Feb 7.

Babar, who missed the recent Sri Lanka series due to his commitments in Australia's Big Bash League (BBL), cut short his campaign to join the national camp. The 31-year-old has been included to bolster the middle order despite a modest outing in the BBL.

Shaheen, meanwhile, makes a comeback after recovering from a knee injury sustained during the BBL. The left-arm fast bowler has been declared fit following medical assessments in Pakistan.

However, there was no place for Haris Rauf despite an impressive BBL campaign in which he claimed 20 wickets.

Pakistan have retained much of the core that toured Sri Lanka and featured in the recent tri-nation series involving Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. While several players showed promise in those contests, the team will be under pressure to improve its consistency against world No.2 Australia, especially with Pakistan currently placed seventh in the T20I rankings.

The pace attack includes Shaheen, Naseem Shah, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Salman Mirza and all-rounder Faheem Ashraf. In the spin department, Abrar Ahmed, Shadab Khan, Mohammad Nawaz and Usman Tariq have been selected.

Shadab continues his comeback following his return in the previous T20I series.

The batting line-up features Fakhar Zaman, Babar, Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha, along with wicket-keepers Sahibzada Farhan, Usman Khan and Khawaja Mohammad Nafay, who impressed on debut in Sri Lanka earlier this month.

Australia will arrive in Lahore on Jan 28 and the series will be played at the Gaddafi Stadium on Jan 29, Jan 31 and Feb 1.

The national squad and support staff are expected to assemble in Lahore on Jan 24 and begin preparations the following day.

After the series, Pakistan will travel to Sri Lanka to play their World Cup matches under the hybrid model, while Australia will head to India for the tournament.

Pakistan's squad for the World Cup will be announced next week. The 2009 champions will begin their Group 'A' campaign against the Netherlands in Colombo on Feb 7.

Squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wicket-keeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wicket-keeper), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wicket-keeper), Usman Tariq.

NONTHABURI (Thailand): Pakistan captain Aliya Sadiq lunges for a tackle against Bangladesh's Masura Parvin during their SAFF Women's Futsal Championship match at the Nonthaburi Stadium on Friday. Pakistan ended their campaign with a humbling 9-1 loss with Sabina Khatun scoring four times for Bangladesh. Nouson Jahan and Krishna Rani Sarkar equally shared four more goals for the winners with Anmol Hira scoring Pakistan's only goal when her side was trailing 7-0. The loss saw Pakistan slip down to fifth in the table with seven points from six matches, a position they are likely to finish with sixth-placed Sri Lanka facing third-placed India in the last round of matches on Sunday. Bangladesh top the table with 13 points, two ahead of Bhutan.—Courtesy SAFF

RUSSIA'S Andrey Rublev hits a backhand against Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina during their Australian Open third-round match at the Melbourne Park on Friday.—AFP

Alcaraz dazzles in 100th Grand Slam match as Gauff, Sabalenka grind through

MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff took a rocky path to the fourth round of the Australian Open on Friday but Carlos Alcaraz glided into the last 16 in his 100th Grand Slam match.

Home favourite Alex de Minaur made the last 16 for the fifth successive year, becoming the second Australian to achieve the feat in the professional era since John Newcombe's run from 1969-76, while third seed Alexander Zverev continued to dominate Briton Cameron Norrie.

A day after 40-year-old Swiss Stan Wawrinka led a parade of yesterday's heroes into the third round, it was the turn of the younger generation to have their moment under the Melbourne sun.

American 18-year-old Iva Jovic toppled seventh seed Jasmine Paolini 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) and Canadian 19-year-old Victoria Mboko beat 14th seed Clara Tauson to book a showdown with twice champion Sabalenka, a 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (9/7) winner over Anastasia Potapova.

Russian 18-year-old Mirra Andreeva joined them by beating Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3 6-4.

Alcaraz earlier produced a highlight-reel 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 win over French drop-shot specialist Corentin Moutet before the 21-year-old Gauff recovered from losing her first set of the event to overhaul fellow American Hailey Baptiste 3-6, 6-0, 6-3.

Chasing a first title at Melbourne Park, the 22-year-old Alcaraz is bidding to become the youngest man to win all four majors and has appeared unstoppable.

In the second match at Rod Laver Arena, he won what might end up as the rally of the tournament against Moutet by chasing down a lob with a 'tweener' and then threading a shot down the line.

Moutet is no slouch but the 32nd seed was reduced to the fall guy in Alcaraz's magic show, becoming the 14th victim in the Spaniard's unbeaten run against left-handers.

Despite the ease of the win, chasing down Moutet's drop shots became a chore, Alcaraz joked.

AUSTRIA'S Anastasia Potapova in action during the third-round match against Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus on Friday.—AFP

"I thought we were in a drop-shot competition — but definitely he won," he said.

While De Minaur's 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 win over American 29th seed Frances Tiafoe lacked the magic on the main showcourt, it was no less efficient , leaving Australian fans happy and hopeful.

It has been 50 years since Mark Edmondson lifted the trophy at the Australian Open and the country's hopes on the men's side have rested on De Minaur in recent years.

"As the years have gone by, I'm looking for more and I'm in a position where I want more," declared De Minaur, who takes on Alexander Bublik next.

"I'm going to be pushing for that."

Like the Australian, Zverev is seeking his maiden Grand Slam trophy, and the German beat Norrie 7-5, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 for a seventh victory over the Briton in as many meetings.

TIEBREAK TYRANT

Sabalenka is favourite to win the women's title but had a torrid time against Russia-born world number 55 Potapova, who represented her adopted nation Austria with distinction.

Victory extended Sabalenka's incredible unbeaten record in tiebreaks to 21, having won 19 in succession last season.

"I know every ball is important in the tiebreak. You can't lose your focus for a second because it's gone really quickly," Sabalenka said. "So you have to be there 100%. That's my approach. I just take it one point at a time."

Three-times men's finalist Daniil Medvedev was another gathering confidence after a tense win.

He became the first player to win from two sets down at this tournament against Hungary's Fabian Marozsan, winning 6-7 (5/7), 4-6, 7-5, 6-0, 6-3 in the early match at Margaret Court Arena.

Medvedev will have revenge on his mind when he plays Learner Tien for a spot in the quarter-finals having been knocked out by the young American in the second round last year.

It was the end of the road for Medvedev's childhood friend Andrey Rublev, who lost 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 to Francisco Cerundolo.

NO MORE TURKISH DELIGHT

Mboko, one of the brightest young talents in women's tennis, reached the fourth round in her Australian Open main draw debut, beating Tauson 7-5, 5-7, 6-3.

But it was the end of Turkish delight at Melbourne Park as wily Kazakh Yulia Putintseva ended Zeynep Sonmez's run.

Melbourne's strong Turkish community was out in force in support of world number 112 Sonmez, decorating Kia Arena with red flags, but Putintseva gleefully taunted them after the victory, blowing kisses and dancing near her seat.

"What can I do? It's just some people have education of tennis and, unfortunately, some of them not," she said, accusing rowdy Sonmez fans of trying to put her off her serve.

Tommy Paul made smooth progress as Alejandro Davidovich Fokina retired trailing 6-1, 6-1, but he next faces the brick wall of Alcaraz.

Czech 19th seed Karolina Muchova thrashed Poland's Magda Linette 6-1, 6-1 to book a match with Gauff while Elina Svitolina beat Diana Shnaider 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.—Reuters

Australia thrash Sri Lanka, BD make U-19 World Cup Super Six

HARARE: Australia maintained their perfect record at the U-19 World Cup 2026 with a crushing nine-wicket victory over Sri Lanka, while Bangladesh booked their place in the Super Six stage with a seven-wicket win over the United States on Wednesday.

In their final Group 'A' fixture, Australia skittled Sri Lanka for a paltry 58, with William Byrom leading the attack with a five-wicket haul, to finish top of the group with three wins from three matches.

Earlier, Bangladesh prevailed in a virtual knockout clash in Harare, where skipper Azizul Hakim Takim struck 64 to guide his side past the USA.

Sri Lanka never recovered from an early collapse triggered by Australia's seamers. Charles Lachmund struck twice in his third over to leave Sri Lanka reeling before Byrom ran through the middle order, claiming four wickets as the innings crumbled to 30 for six.

Although Chamika Heentigala offered brief resistance with 14, Sri Lanka were eventually dismissed for 58, with Byrom returning to pick up his fifth wicket. Hayden Schiller and Kasey Barton supported the effort with tidy spells.

Australia's chase was straightforward despite losing Will Malajczuk for four in the opening over. Steven Hogan (28 not out) and Nitesh Samuel (19 not out) then added an unbroken 58-run stand to complete the formalities inside 12 overs.

In Harare, Bangladesh produced a composed performance to beat the USA by seven wickets in a winner-takes-all contest for a Super Six berth.

Put in to bat, the USA were rocked early before Sahil Garg (35) and Utkarsh Srivastava (39) steadied the innings with a 51-run stand. Bangladesh struck back through Shahriar Ahmed and Iqbal Hossain, and the USA slipped to 128 for seven.

Adnit Jhamb, however, staged a fine counterattack, finishing unbeaten on 68 to lift his side to 199, all out off the final ball.

Bangladesh began their reply in positive fashion as Zawad Abrar struck 47 in a 78-run opening stand. After the fall of both openers, Azizul Hakim Takim took control of the chase, sharing an 88-run partnership with Kalam Siddiki Aleen (30 not out).

Azizul was eventually dismissed for 64 with 24 still required, but Rizan Hossan, who had earlier taken two wickets, struck a brisk 20 to see Bangladesh home with little fuss.—Agencies

Milne ruled out of NZ's T20 World Cup squad

AUCKLAND: New Zealand paceman Adam Milne has been ruled out of the T20 World Cup with a torn left hamstring and will be replaced in the squad by fellow quick Kyle Jamieson.

Milne suffered the injury while bowling in the SA20 competition at the weekend with scans revealing the extent of the injury, New Zealand Cricket said on Friday.

Jamieson, who is currently part of the white-ball squad touring India, is promoted to the World Cup squad after originally being named as a travelling reserve for the February-March tournament in India and Sri Lanka.

"We're all gutted for Adam," coach Rob Walter said in a statement. "He'd worked so hard to get himself ready for the tournament and was looking back to his best in his eight games for the Eastern Cape Sunrisers.

"It's unfortunate timing for Adam and we wish him a speedy recovery."—Reuters

Indian captain Yadav regains form in big win against NZ

NEW DELHI: India captain Suryakumar Yadav regained form ahead of the team's title defence at next month's World Cup as he and Ishan Kishan smashed rapid fifties to secure their seven-wicket victory over New Zealand in the second Twenty20 International in Raipur on Friday.

Suryakumar hammered an unbeaten 82 after Kishan's blistering 76 as India chased down a target of 209 with 28 balls to spare for a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

Put into bat, New Zealand posted a commanding 208-6 with captain Mitchell Santner top-scoring for them with an unbeaten 47.

India rested pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and did not risk spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel, who suffered a thumb injury in the first match, ahead of the T20 World Cup.

New Zealand began briskly against India's depleted attack before openers Devon Conway (19) and Tim Seifert (24) fell in successive overs.

Rachin Ravindra (44) smashed four sixes and two fours in his 26-ball blitz before falling to spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who also got rid of the dangerous Glenn Phillips (19).

Santner and Zak Foulkes, who made 15 not out, took New Zealand past the 200-mark.

India wobbled in their chase losing Sanju Samson in the first over while fellow opener Abhishek Sharma fell for a first-ball duck in the next.

Kishan counter-attacked in a spectacular manner hitting four sixes and 11 fours in his 32-ball knock.

Suryakumar's first fifty in 24 T20 Internationals was not a chanceless knock, though, and the India captain was dropped three times including once by his New Zealand counterpart Santner.

Shivam Dube made 36 not out off 18 balls in a dominant batting display by the hosts.

The teams now move to Guwahati for the third match on Sunday.—Reuters

Scoreboard

NEW ZEALAND:
D. Conway c Pandya b Rana 19
T. Seifert c Kishan b Chakaravarthy 24
R. Ravindra c A. Singh b K. Yadav..... 44
G. Phillips c Pandya b K. Yadav 19
D. Mitchell c Pandya b Dube..... 18
M. Chapman c Sharma b Pandya 10
M. Santner not out 47
Z. Foulkes not out 15
EXTRAS (B-4, LB-2, W-6) 12
TOTAL (for six wickets, 20 overs) 208
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-43 (Conway), 2-43 (Seifert), 3-98 (Phillips), 4-125 (Mitchell), 5-129 (Ravindra), 6-161 (Chapman)
DID NOT BAT: M. Henry, I. Sodhi, J. Duffy
BOWLING: A. Singh 4-0-53-0 (1w), Pandya 3-0-25-1 (1w), Rana 3-1-35-1 (2w), Chakaravarthy 4-0-35-1 (2w), K. Yadav 4-0-35-2, Sharma 1-0-12-0, Dube 1-0-7-1

INDIA:
S. Samson c Ravindra b Henry 6
A. Sharma c Conway b Duffy 0
I. Kishan c Henry b Sodhi 76
S. Yadav not out..... 82
S. Dube not out..... 36
EXTRAS (NB-1, W-8) 9
TOTAL (for three wickets, 15.2 overs).... 209
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-6 (Samson), 2-6 (Sharma), 3-128 (Kishan)
DID NOT BAT: R. Singh, H. Pandya, H. Rana, A. Singh, K. Yadav, V. Chakravarthy
BOWLING: Henry 3-0-41-1 (1w), Duffy 4-0-38-1 (1w), Foulkes 3-0-67-0 (5w, 1nb), Santner 2-0-27-0 (1w), Sodhi 3-0-34-1, Mitchell 0.2-0-2-0
RESULT: India won by seven wickets.

INDIAN captain Suryakumar Yadav runs after playing a shot during the second Twenty20 International against New Zealand on Friday.—AFP

T20 World Cup row overshadows India's Olympic ambitions

NEW DELHI: India hopes next month's T20 World Cup will bolster its credentials as a global sports host — and the country's Olympic ambitions — but preparations have been rocked by a diplomatic row with Bangladesh and accusations of political interference.

With barely two weeks until the tournament, Bangladesh have effectively been forced out after the International Cricket Council (ICC) rejected a request to move their matches from India to co-hosts Sri Lanka, citing security concerns.

"Our only demand is to play the World Cup— but not in India," Bangladesh Cricket Board President Aminul Islam Bulbul told reporters on Thursday, adding that without a change of venue, the team would not participate.

India is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, seen as a stepping stone to the 2036 Olympics.

But the chaotic build-up to the T20 World Cup has cast a shadow over those ambitions, especially with cricket returning to the Olympic Games at Los Angeles 2028.

The T20 World Cup schedule was delayed and not released until December and as per reports on Indian media on Friday, it appears Scotland could have to be drafted to replace Bangladesh just days before the opening match on February 7.

'NO ONE TO CHALLENGE'

"Bangladesh is a cricket-loving nation. If a country of nearly 200 million people misses the World Cup, the ICC will lose a huge audience," Bulbul added. "Cricket is entering the Olympics in 2028, Brisbane in 2032, India is bidding for 2036. Excluding a major cricket-loving country like Bangladesh would be a failure."

The ICC said it had found "no credible or verifiable threat" to move Bangladesh's games, and was committed to "safeguarding the collective interests of the global game".

But that global game is dominated by India, where cricket is woven deep into culture, the economy and politics.

South Asia accounts for about 90 percent of cricket's billion-plus fans, with India generating roughly three-quarters of the sport's global income.

India's supremacy stems from the outsized revenues of its BCCI cricket board, flush with cash from its role as custodian of the most popular sport in the world's most populous country.

Sports journalist Pradeep Magazine wrote in the Tribune, an Indian daily, that the BCCI's "staggering revenues... gives it unimaginable control over decision-making in cricketing affairs of the world".

"There is no one to challenge India's hegemony." ICC chairman Jay Shah is the son of Amit Shah, India's powerful interior minister, and right-hand man of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

'A POLITICAL ISSUE'

"Cricket has been captured completely by politics in a way that it never has been before," Indian sports journalist Sharda Ugra told AFP. "The Bangladesh issue has reached where it has because it's a political issue."

Political relations between India and Bangladesh have soured since a mass uprising in Dhaka in 2024 toppled Sheikh Hasina, now a convicted fugitive hosted by old ally New Delhi.

But matters escalated after the India Premier League (IPL) team Kolkata Knight Riders were ordered by India's BCCI board to drop Bangladeshi fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman, triggering fury in Dhaka.

Mustafizur's removal followed online outrage by right-wing Indian Hindus who invoked alleged attacks on a fellow community in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Dhaka maintains that Indian media had exaggerated the scale of the violence.

Bangladesh's interim government sports adviser Asif Nazrul said that "no one should have a monopoly" over cricket.

"If the ICC truly wants to be a global organisation, and if the ICC does not rise and sit at India's command, then we must be given the opportunity to play in the T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka," Nazrul said.

Bangladesh wanted to follow the example of Pakistan, who will play all their matches in Sri Lanka under a deal hatched after India refused to travel to Islamabad for the 2025 Champions Trophy and all their games were moved in Dubai.

Nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan have fought multiple conflicts since they were divided at the end of British rule in 1947 and are bitter rivals on the pitch, refusing to shake hands in their recent matches.

"There is no one in the ICC who can stand up to anything that the BCCI says or does," said Ugra. "The BCCI and the ICC are the same thing at the moment."—AFP